

MAJOR LEAGUE LACROSSE

Quinzani, Cannons win National Championship

Duxbury native finishes season with 22 goals, 10 assists

GateHouse News Service

DUXBURY — It's not like Duxbury's Max Quinzani was going to sneak up on anyone in Major League Lacrosse. Not after he'd led Duxbury High to three straight state championships from 2004 to 2006 while playing on teams with an aggregate record of 96-4. Not after he'd set a national high school scoring record with 577 points.

And not after he'd been Duke University's Senior Athlete of the Year in 2010, while leading the nation's collegians with 68 goals, including 15 hat tricks. Certainly not after he'd graduated from Duke as the program's (and NCAA's) No. 2 all-time goal scorer with 199.

Now, Quinzani can call himself a national champion — on the

professional level. Sunday, the Cannons won their first MLL Championship, beating the Hamilton Nationals, 10-9, at Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium in Annapolis.

The 2011 Boston Cannons roared through the MLL regular season with a 9-3 mark and clinched first place a few weeks ago.

Drafted in the first round, third overall, by his hometown Cannons, Quinzani played in seven games last summer. The 5-foot-8, 170-pounder demonstrated that his talent would translate well in the MLL's wide-open style by scoring a hat trick in his first pro game. He finished the season with 14 goals and 5 assists, fitting in well with established veterans such as Paul Rabil and Matt Poskay on the Cannons' attack.

But the team stumbled badly in the playoffs last year after entering the postseason as the top

seed. The Cannons, who have never won an MLL title, dropped a 13-9 decision to the Chesapeake Bayhawks, who went on to take the 2010 crown. That early exit put a damper on the rookies' promising campaign.

We caught up with Quinzani as he was riding Amtrak back home to Boston for the Cannons' regular-season finale. Eager to keep their winning mojo going, the Cannons defeated Rochester, 16-15, in overtime, with Quinzani contributing two goals and an assist. He finished the 2011 regular season with 22 goals and 10 assists, with his 32 points good for third overall on the team, behind Rabil's 49 points and Poskay's 37. Quinzani's scoring prowess was good enough for an eighth-place tie among all MLL scorers.

"I'm working for a bank in New York City," Quinzani said. "Every Friday I catch an early train back to Boston for practice,

and then Saturday nights we have our games. I meet up with Kevin Gould (Duxbury teammate, Bentley College standout and now a Cannons reserve) every Friday and we ride up together, so that's pretty good. And I am able to see a lot of my old buddies every weekend."

With talent like Rabil and Poskay around him, Cannons' foes really haven't been able to focus just on Quinzani. And just as he did at Duxbury, and then Duke, Quinzani is just as happy assisting on a score as scoring the goal himself.

"I pretty much got comfortable in the Cannons' system when I played the seven games last summer," Quinzani said. "My first year went pretty well, until the last two or three games, when our team just seemed to lose its edge. We kind of stumbled going into the playoffs last year, which was really disappointing."

Of course, when a player has

been such a scoring machine at every level, it looks like everything comes easily for him. But Quinzani felt a big difference in his abbreviated MLL debut season last summer, and has had to continue making adjustments this year.

"The main thing I noticed in the pros was that the goalies are definitely bigger and better," Quinzani said. "You are getting no freebie goals, for sure. It took me some time to get used to that, along with the fact that all the teams have excellent defenders. Of course it helped me tremendously that I was playing with guys like Matt Poskay and Paul Rabil, who are very talented all-around players."

"The defenses did not reinvent the wheel to cover me," Quinzani said, chuckling. "The main thing was that these defenders have been around the game a lot longer than your typ-

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ical college kid, so, for example, those backdoor cuts that I love didn't work every time up here. They know what I like to do, so now I have to adjust for that and play the percentages, try different things and make them react to me. Eventually they will be able to stop me a certain number of times, but I will also get my goals too. It was an adjustment in that regard, but don't forget, Duke plays a pretty high-level schedule, so I was around a lot of smart players in college, too."

Major League Lacrosse is not quite like most pro sports, in that the players all have day jobs and games are all clustered around weekends to accommodate that. But it also means that most teams are like the Cannons, limited to those hurried Friday night practices before they play Saturday night. And when they're playing on the road, travel on either Friday or game-day Saturday makes it more hectic.

"I try to work out at least three days a week," Quinzani said. "But it can be tough because not many of my friends in New York City are lacrosse guys. You just try to keep yourself in game shape and make those weekend practices. It is definitely tougher on

teamwork, but we are all pros and we understand what we have to do to play the game right, and it's generally more a case of tweaking things a little at practice. And more importantly, everyone in this league is very talented, so it's not like we need to be outside working on catching the ball and passing the ball every day."

Quinzani's rise to MLL stardom is a terrific story, both for the local lacrosse scene and also for the Cannons, who made their debut in 2000. He's not just a home-grown player, he's a lax-lifer who grew up following the Cannons. Among the many fans in the grandstand in those first few Cannons seasons was Max Quinzani and his dad, and of course he fantasized about one day playing the pro game.

"I don't know if I could say I aspired to be here, but probably I did," Quinzani said. "I went to a lot of their games with my dad, and obviously I wanted to play the game as long as I could. Lacrosse is a part of who I am, but the pro game was not exactly a goal. It's tougher up here, obviously, and I know I can't go out and break records every day, or play my best game every day. My routine is hectic, and I travel by train every weekend, and I'm usually lucky to catch the tail end of practice. It's not an easy week

of working and trying to work out, and fit in all the hours I need, but I look at the weekend games as my relief from all that. Playing is a great stress reliever."

Quinzani added that he had not tried to hide his second career from his banking bosses, and in fact noted it on his application. He's not surrounded by lacrosse fans at work, but they all seem to enjoy and support his sports addiction. He's been in enough locker rooms to realize the more grief he gets, the more they like him.

"I was very open about my playing when I went through the hiring process," Quinzani said. "I tried to use it as a positive influence, and of course it is a big part of my life. All my co-workers know what I'm doing every weekend - they sure see the bruises when I come in Monday morning. They knew what they were getting, and usually I'm the butt of a whole lot of ribbing on Mondays."

"It's a pretty busy schedule, but I still have time to do my own stuff, and I like the whole experience of playing in the MLL right now," Quinzani said. "I want to keep doing it as long as I can. I like living my life in constant motion."



Duxbury's Max Quinzani and the Boston Cannons of Major League Lacrosse won the 2011 MLL National Championship last weekend. STAFF FILE
PHOTO/ROBIN CHAN